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RUEHGO/AMEMBASSY RANGOON PRIORITY 1152  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 5099  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 0642  
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 7787  
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA PRIORITY 0197  
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 4002  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 9831  
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 4568  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 002836

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SUBJECT: INDIA-CHINA RELATIONS PART ONE - BUDDING MIL-MIL  
COOPERATION: MORE COSMETIC THAN SUBSTANTIVE?

NEW DELHI 00002836 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Political Counselor Ted Osius for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Indian Army Chief General and Chairman of Staffs Committee (COSC) J.J. Singh led a delegation of army, navy, and air force officers on a five-day visit to China in an effort to expand military relations. Highlights of the visit included:  
-an agreement to conduct periodic joint army exercises encompassing counterterrorism, anti-piracy, and search and rescue operations in the near future;  
-a decision to hold top-level annual meetings between the two militaries beginning with a defense dialogue to be held in New Delhi within the next two months;  
-India's first access to various People's Liberation Army (PLA) installations and formations and areas within Beijing's Academy of Military Sciences and Central Military Commission (CMC); and  
-a move to open up one another's military training institutions. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) This is the first in a three-part series on India-China relations.

----- ANOTHER PHASE OF MILITARY RELATIONS -----

13. (C) Indian Army Chief J.J. Singh's 21-25 May visit to China represented the third phase of enhanced India-China military relations. It was only the third visit to China by an Indian Army Chief and the first by a COSC. According to a Ministry of Defense (MOD) statement on the visit, the first phase of increased military relations was the establishment of a "peace and tranquility" mechanism along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). Over time, the initiative has expanded to include cultural and sports events that are attended by security forces on both sides of the border. Stage two allowed observers at military exercises and extended attendance at military training facilities. The MOD characterized General Singh's visit as the phase of

"high-level visits to each other's military establishments."

¶4. (C) Media and Embassy contacts report that General Singh met with his counterpart PLA Army Chief General Liang Guanglie, Vice-Chairman of the CMC General Guo Boxiong, Vice-President Zeng Qinghong, and the new Foreign Minister Yang Jiechie. In addition to the Central Military Commission, General Singh's delegation reportedly visited the Academy of Military Sciences in Beijing as well as the 15 Airborne Corps at Wuhan, the 28 Airborne Division at Hangzhou, and a naval base in Shanghai. Associate Professor for East Asian Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) Dr. Swaran Singh noted that, "the most important aspect of General Singh's visit was the atmosphere of enhanced trust symbolized by China's willingness to open up military sites such as the areas in the CMC never before seen by Indian officials." Associate Fellow at Delhi's Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses (IDSA) Dr. Abanti Bhattacharya agreed that General Singh's visit represented a big shift in contacts. "However, sending officers is more cosmetic than substantive. Exchanging scholars to learn and understand the language, history, and culture of each other's country is the key to improved relations."

----- A NEW DEFENSE DIALOGUE -----

¶5. (C) The 30 May issue of "The Hindu" noted Indian Ambassador to China Nirupama Rao's comments that the first defense dialogue will be held in New Delhi in a few months and become an annual event. The defense dialogue follows the road map to increased military-to-military contact laid out in India and China's Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by former Defense Minister Pranab Mukherjee and his counterpart General Cao Gangchuan during Mukherjee's May 2006 visit to China. General J.J. Singh's visit is seen as a

NEW DELHI 00002836 002.2 OF 002

follow up to operationalize the 2006 MOU. Although two joint naval exercises were held in 2006 in Shanghai and Kochi and another held in April 2007 in Qingdao, General Singh finalized the agreement for the first army-to-army exercise during his May trip. While Ambassador Vinod C. Khanna (retd.) lauded the new Defense Dialogue as integral for an exchange of views to understand strategic positions in the region, Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS) Director Dipankar Bannerjee cautioned that it would take more than a defense dialogue to alter the current asymmetrical power relationship and patronizing attitude of the Chinese. General Chopra (retd.) noted observed that the joint army exercises were purely symbolic given the small number of troops involved. Ambassador Khanna said that, however small, "who would have dreamed that we be discussing joint military exercises with China a decade ago? These small exercises can be used as building blocks for more far-reaching exercises in the future."

----- MILITARIES CONTINUE TO FORGE AHEAD DESPITE DIPLOMATIC FRAYS -----

¶6. (C) COMMENT: However small these first steps toward military-to-military cooperation may be, they reinforce India's realpolitik policy towards its gigantic northern neighbor: maintain stable relations. It is doubtful that there will ever be a true cooperative military relationship between the two countries, but even cosmetic progress can be valuable in shaping perceptions about the state of the relationship. The Indian military will continue to make nice with the PLA for legitimate security reasons and, particularly, for as long as India perceives a gap in its asymmetrical power relationship with China. Post will report septel on how the budding military relationship feeds into India's larger China policy. END COMMENT.

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